I thought by now you'd realize, there ain't no way to hide your lion eyes

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

The Lion King needs little introduction. It tells the tale of how Disney stole the concept, themes and artwork for their first 'original' animated movie from a Japanese manga comic strip created by Osamu Tezuka, first published in 1950.

Kimba the White Lion - or Jungle Emperor as it has alternately been translated - treads similar ground, albeit via a markedly different plot.

Kimba, a young lion cub, escapes through the bars of his mother's cage having been born at sea. Seemingly destined to live out their days imprisoned in a zoo, a boat-wrecking tropical storm rages casting Kimba into the voracious waves, radically altering the course of his destiny.

Taught to swim by the fish, he survives the ordeal, eventually washing up on dry land where he is adopted by human carers. Kind of like the Jungle Book vice versa-ed... ish.

A coming of age 'circle of life' motifed saga follows as Kimba grows physically, spiritually and intellectually, vowing to one day return to the jungle to educate the inhabitants on the importance of effective human-wildlife communication and the need for symbiotic harmony between the two parties.

Disney *did* at least cobble together their own narrative to bind Tezuka's cast, inspired by Shakespeare's Hamlet no less. *Simba*, not *Kimba*, is to inherit the throne from his father, Mufasa, to become King of the Pride Lands. Throwing a spanner in the works, Simba's jealous, malevolent uncle Scar murders his brother, Mufasa, and coerces Simba into believing he caused his father's untimely demise.

Simba is driven into exile by misplaced guilt and shame, yet 'With a Little Help From His Friends' he 'Gets By'. Once he knows the truth, Simba returns to his homeland to stake his rightful claim to the throne, overthrowing Scar's tyranny. With the usual life-lessons learned everyone rejoices as they tuck into extra helpings of saccharine-laced sentimentality pie.

...and Disney divvy up the shareholder's portion of the $968.5m box office takings, having first deducted their lawyer's fees. Probably a few other little expenses too.

Several months after the movie hit theatres around the globe, a tie-in game was principally released for the SNES and Mega Drive in time for Christmas 1994, with the Amiga and various 8-bit platforms receiving their own interpretations in synchrony or shortly thereafter.

It was extremely well received and stands out for a number of reasons. Quite possibly ones that made Lion King unique at the time.

For the majority of the game, you play as two separate sprites, each imbued with their own distinct traits, aptitudes and control mechanics. Beginning as Simba, the timid, placid lion cub, you're endowed with a feeble roar 'weapon' that wouldn't scare the skin off rice pudding. Yet, compensating for his lack of ferocity, baby Simba handles with the nimble dexterity required to precisely roll into, or bounce on the heads of, various threatening wildlife.

In later levels, we mature to become adult Simba who is naturally a majestic, mighty specimen what with being king of the jungle. With the transformation, we acquire a selection of much-needed killer attack manoeuvres, such as a more potent roar...

…menacing maul, and a throw that would look right at home in the WCW square circle. To ensure our journey is no walk in the park post-sprite-upgrade, as a trade-off, we must accede the cumbersome controls commensurate with Simba's augmented strength.

This and the non-linear difficulty curve is what Lion King is best remembered for. Level one is practically a tutorial to ease us into the action, while the monkey-aligning segment found in level two is amongst the hardest parts of the entire game because it relies so heavily on trial and error experimentation with few pointers as to what's required.

Our aim here is to roar at the monkeys to cause them to alter their position and therefore the direction in which they fling Simba whenever he leaps into their arms. Mis-configure any one of them and the sequence is broken, leading us to fall to our doom, forced to start again.
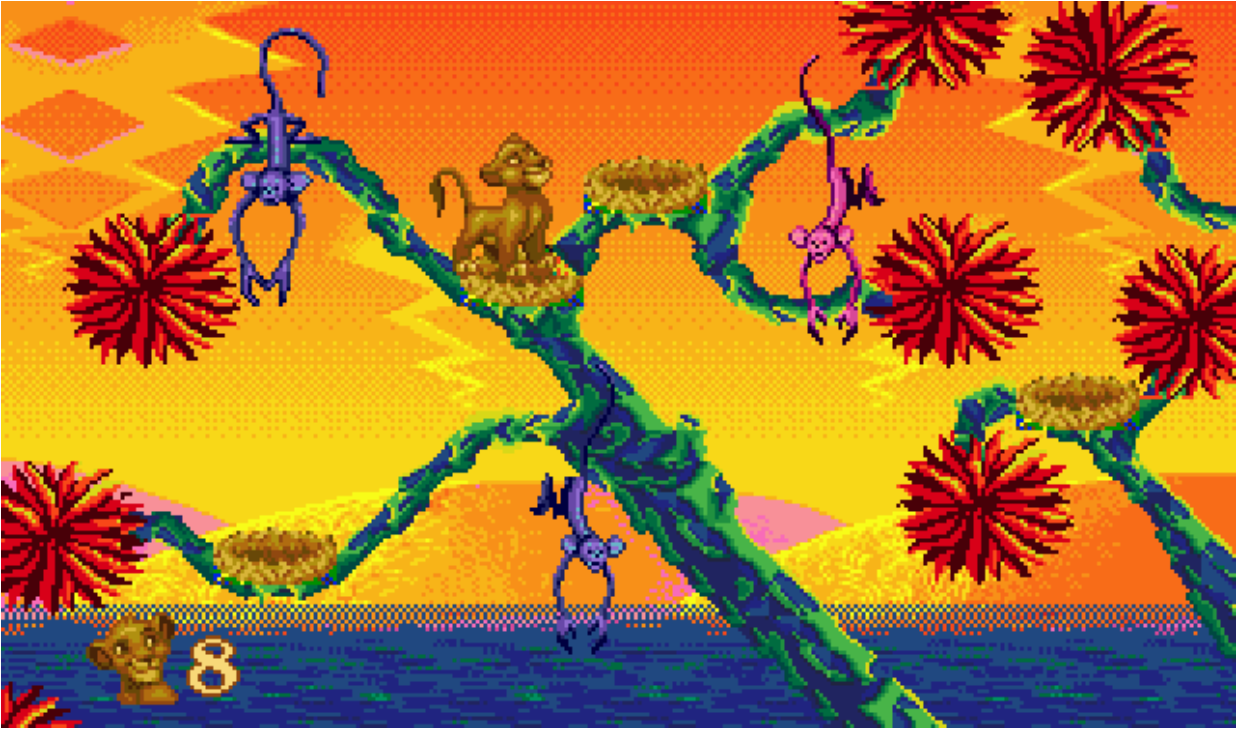
We learn from Westwood producer, Louis Castle, that this was a deliberate ruse implemented so as to comply with Disney's insistence on player's only being able to complete a designated percentage of the game in a certain time-frame. Their concern was that those of us renting the game from the likes of Blockbuster wouldn't be inclined to buy it outright should we believe that the price didn't justify the longevity.

Louis disagreed in principle assuming the unique experience, vivid, luscious artwork and authentic music alone would guarantee a chart-topping hit. Nevertheless, he was obliged to toe the line to appease the license holders, as is often the case with IP-driven titles. Artistic freedom versus box-ticking is a well-worn battleground with which game developers will be all too familiar.

Other - more politically correct - alterations Disney insisted upon entailed replacing all trace of blood resulting from lacerations with a flourish of orange fur, and projectiles of the faecal variety with nuts. Whilst this was the work of the officially endorsed Disney animation team, the 'suits' insisted the design be sanitised prior to the final release so as not to taint Disney's prudently guarded reputation.

Ardent fans of the SNES and pared-down Mega Drive original would be unlikely to approve of the diluted product delivered to Amiga gamers. While PC owners enjoy a port that includes all the console version's levels, sadly the Amiga game - ported from the Mega Drive edition - is an abridged affair missing several key stages. Notably, the protagonist-switching bonus stages starring Simba's outcast pals, Timon & Pumbaa, as well as the standard ones entitled 'Can't Wait to be King', Hakuna Matata, and 'Simba's Return'.

In the opening paragraph of the instruction manual there's an apology for this deficit, citing a lack of disk space as the explanation. It's a four floppy game *without* these stages so it's easy to see why publishers, Virgin, would have wanted to rein it in.

The Mega Drive graphics - comprising 400 frames of animation for baby Simba alone - passed to the Amiga conversion team amounted to 600mb worth of data, so crunching that down to a mere four disks is an amazing feat in itself. Even *before* you learn that the whole process took just two months, driven by the looming Christmas deadline.

Accordingly, Amiga programmer, Dave Semmens, who converted the Mega Drive's C source code to assembly language, chalks up the level-culling to a lack of time rather than data capacity. In theory, there would be nothing stopping Dave, graphician Doug Townsley and musician Allister Brimble, from filling up ten disks to match the SNES game's surfeit of assets. Except it would have eaten into the profit margins and resulted in a horrendous amount of disk swapping. No HD install option was available at the time of release, adding ample weight to the argument.

Despite their absence, screenshots of the non-existent levels appear on the Amiga game's box, albeit with a disclaimer warning that they 'may' have been taken from a different version. Ah, *that* old chestnut. You'd think this gambit would have been retired along with the Spectrum.

Nonetheless, it's a competent replica that was largely met with glowing praise. Much of the affection for Lion King the game stems from its capacity to evoke fond memories of the cartoon. An achievement that can be attributed to Disney's diligent supervision of the project, their resolute advocacy of high quality licensed products, as well as the developers' dedication to translating the family favourite with such care and attention to detail.

Each level is significantly different to the last, one, in particular, supplanting the perspective and mechanics entirely. This wildebeest-stampeding episode sees Simba hurtling out of the screen towards the player as he attempts to avert being trampled to death. This was one of Louis Castle's many contributions to the game, a concept adapted

from the 3D maze featured in the Apple II title, Bloodstone, which he coded upon first breaking into the industry.

Other areas are less refined, the unpredictable control system, in particular, receiving the brunt of the criticism. Our roar is only effective against certain adversaries and this varies with age. Deploying Simba's roll as a weapon too is inconsistent, and frustratingly, can't be cut short mid-animation cycle. Some critters are immune to it, others susceptible.

Specific animals *can* be attacked… with caveats. For instance, the hyenas are only vulnerable following an attack of their own; when they are in recovery mode, panting to catch their breath. Similarly, vultures must be assailed as they attempt to swoop in for the kill, and can't be tackled in mid-air.
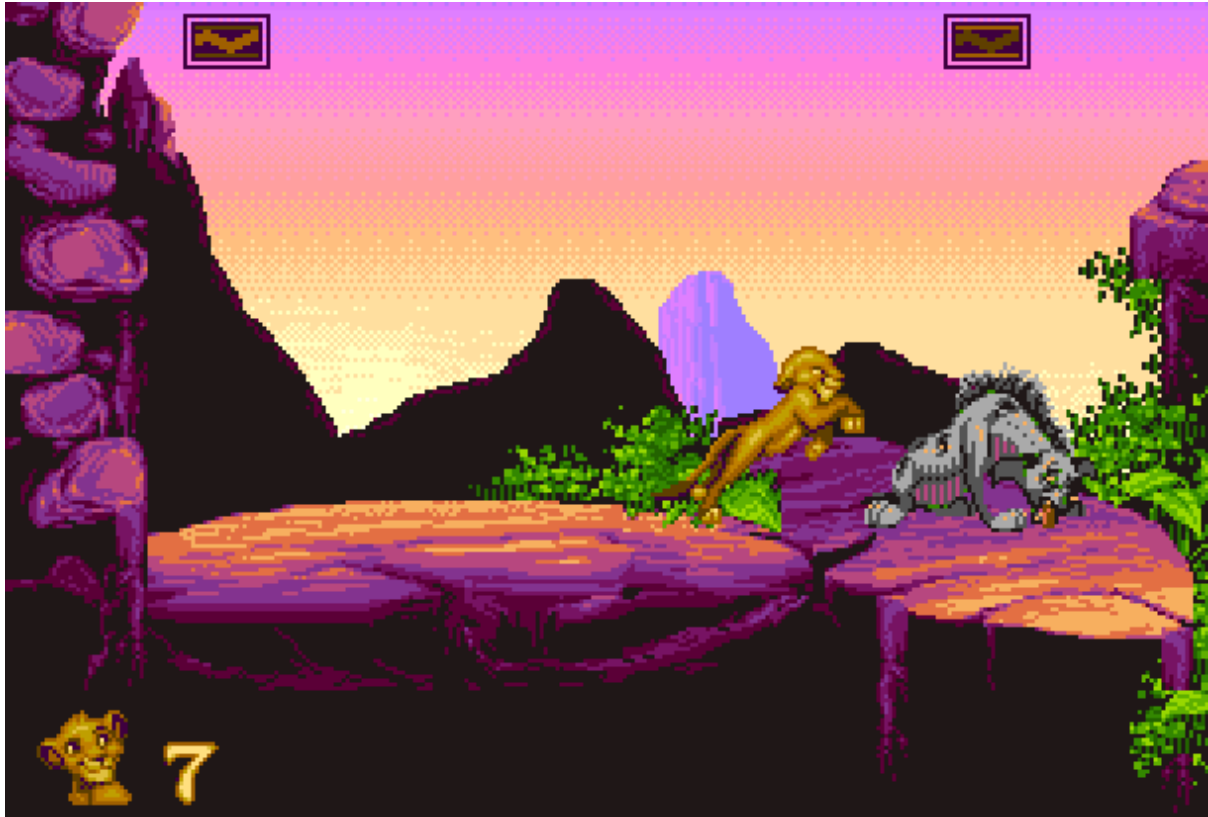
You *could* argue that learning these nuances (and how best to take advantage of the interactive, facilitating cast) is all part of the challenge. That these are design choices, *not* flaws. Dodgy collision detection is another matter entirely.

A number of scenes from the cartoon are replicated in-game (even some that were left on the cutting room floor). Not least the finale in which we must tussle with Scar to overthrow his unwarranted rule. If you're familiar with the source material you'll know that our evil uncle can only be defeated by hurling him over the precipice of Pride Rock. You can slash and claw all you like, and it'll get you precisely nowhere. Who says watching cartoons is a waste of time, eh?

Hypnotised by Disney's consummate pros - their slick animation reminiscent of Prince of Persia's rotoscoped platform-climbing routines - while we're serenaded with Elton

John's timeless ballads, the Lion King is possibly the closest we'll get to playing the cartoon behind the game.

If you can persevere with the repetitive button-mashing exercise that transpires, and forgive Disney's wholesale IP theft, this is the four-legged regicide mission for you.